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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 8294
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TAGS: OPRC KMDR TU

SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2007

In Today's Papers

AKP Names Gul as Presidential Candidate
All papers report Turkey's ruling AKP will re-nominate Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul as its sole candidate to stand in the presidential election, to be conducted in the parliament next week. Papers report Gul, accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin and Labor Minister Murat Basesgioglu, will first meet with opposition party leaders Tuesday to garner support before officially announcing his bid for the presidency.

Deniz Baykal, leader of the main opposition CHP, said he is opposed to Gul as president because of Gul's Islamist past, not because of his wife's headscarf. Baykal said CHP has "serious doubts about Gul's loyalty to republican values." CHP has not yet responded to Gul's request for an appointment with Baykal. The far-right MHP said it does not want chaos in the presidential election, signaling it will cooperate with the AKP. MHP leader Devlet Bahceli will meet with Gul on Tuesday. MHP Secretary General Cihan Pacaci said Gul's nomination was "expected," noting that as already announced, the MHP will attend the session on the presidential elections. The pro-Kurdish DTP, which has 20 MPs, welcomed Gul's nomination and said they were not concerned about the headscarf issue. DTP lawmaker Sirri Sakik said the DTP wants a president that "would cover all the 72 million people in Turkey," hoping that Gul would put forward projects for freedom, democracy, and human rights.

Under the page one headline "Headscarf on its way to the Palace," leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says Gul chose to ignore calls for compromise in pressing ahead with his presidential bid. Mainstream Milliyet is asking whether Gul, if elected president, will take his headscarf-wearing wife to the August 30 Victory Day reception to be hosted by the Turkish General Staff (TGS). The Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak says Prime Minister Erdogan fully backs Gul, rejecting speculation the PM did not want Gul to run again for the presidency because of possible strains with the secular establishment. The paper also expects some CHP lawmakers to support Gul in the

secret-ballot voting.

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The first round of voting has been set for August 20. Gul is not expected to win until the third round on August 28 when he needs only a simple majority of votes in the parliament.

Editorial Commentary on Gul's Presidential Bid

Okay Gonensin writes in the mainstream daily Milliyet: "The main cause of the most recent political crisis was Abdullah Gul's presidential candidacy. However, the results from the ballot boxes proved that one of every two voters favored Gul and his party, the AKP. On the other hand, it will certainly be very difficult for many people to digest the idea of Gul in the presidential seat with his wife wearing a headscarf and having sued Turkey in the European Court of Human Rights over her right to wear it. Democracy requires that we get used to seeing undesired things or circumstances in order to preserve the fundamental principles of the regime. Given Gul's performance as Foreign Minister as well as Prime Minister, calling his presidency a potential disaster would be an emotional overreaction. Gul will have the time to eliminate worries during his presidency. The most important thing is to judge him by what he does, whether we like him or not."

Seyfettin Gursel writes in the business and political daily Referans (8/14): "I have no problem with Gul and no problem with his wife's headscarf. Turkey's real problem is its maturing democracy which requires fundamental constitutional changes in order to pave the way for contemporary liberal tendencies and to reshape the army's role. Unfortunately Gul's presidency will be a reason to slow down or even prevent the new constitution process. The debate and paranoia over his presidency will diminish the energy as well as enthusiasm for a democratic constitution. The AKP should have thought about naming someone with a lower profile and then exerting all of its energy on

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getting the reforms."

Erdogan to Submit Cabinet List to Sezer Thursday

All papers report Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin said Prime Minister Erdogan could submit his new cabinet list to President Sezer on Thursday, ending ongoing speculation in the Turkish media that Erdogan would wait for the election of a new president before submitting his cabinet list for approval by the head of state. Papers note if Sezer objects to some names in the list, Erdogan will wait to re-submit it to the new president.

Zebari: Talabani, Barzani Support MOU with Turkey

Milliyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet and Zaman report Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said on Monday President Jalal Talabani and Kurdistan regional administration leader Massoud Barzani fully support the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his Turkish counterpart Erdogan in Ankara last week.

Maliki told Turkey's English-language daily The New Anatolian's internet edition that the objections by unqualified Iraqi Kurdish officials to the MOU signed by Maliki should be disregarded. Zebari said Talabani and Barzani have no objections to Maliki's statement that the Iraqis are opposed to all terrorist organizations including the PKK operating on Iraqi territories.

Kurdish MPs Want to Attend Funerals of Soldiers Killed by PKK

Mainstream Hurriyet reports Kurdish party DTP MPs, after having shaken hands with nationalist MHP and announced they would go to the games of the Turkish national soccer team, are now searching for ways to attend the funerals of martyred soldiers killed in fighting with the PKK militants. DTP party group chairman Selahattin Demirtas welcomed the proposal put forth by Kurdish MP Sebahat Tuncel, but warned that the funerals have been exploited for political goals and that the participation of DTP members could stir tensions.

Government to Mediate Between Turkish Airlines, Unions

All papers report the Turkish government has set up a commission to prevent a Turkish Airlines (THY) strike, Deputy Prime Minister

Mehmet Ali Sahin said on Monday. Sahin said the commission comprising himself, Finance Minister Kemal Unakitan and Labor Minister Murat Basesgioglu would work for compromise between THY and labor unions which are reportedly demanding higher wages and expanded benefits. The cabinet has the authority to postpone any strike at companies deemed "strategic," including THY.

TV Highlights
NTV, 7.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- More than 10 days have passed after a main water pipeline burst and was repaired in Ankara, but some neighborhoods in the capital still have no water.
- A group of suspected PKK militants threw Molotov cocktails into an empty commuter bus and street car in Istanbul Monday night.
- Energy Minister Hilmi Guler will travel to Tehran on Friday to finalize an electricity and natural gas agreement.
- More than 40 passengers were injured when a sea bus collided with a Ukrainian cargo vessel off the Zeytinburnu district in Istanbul.

International News

- Ankara has offered to host an autumn international conference on the Middle East peace, first proposed by the US. Israel reportedly supports the Turkish proposal.

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- Greek Cypriot Foreign Minister Erato Kozakou Markoulli said Turkish troops, "occupiers" in northern Cyprus, should pull out of the divided island.
- Karl Rove, a political advisor to President Bush, will resign at the end of this month.
- Two South Korean women held hostage by the Taliban for more than three weeks in Afghanistan were freed on Monday.

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